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Free Press May Have Done Service In Exposing Spongy U.S. Security

We have been thinking over President Kennedy's recent public discussion of how to keep the free press free without giving aid, comfort and secret information to the enemy. And while we recognize the dilemma, and agree that the nation is engaged in a very real although unfamiliar kind of war, we are compelled to say first that he must be more specific and second that holes in the government's security arrangements probably need attention more quickly than the conscience of the press. Only the President can patch those holes.

Giving Mr. Kennedy the benefit of a doubt about how much thought he gave to his New York speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association before he delivered it, he at least might have asked the assemblage to set up a committee to study the question with him. Actually the publishers could still do this themselves, possibly in conjunction with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, but some time and a lot of good feeling might have been gained if an invitation had been issued. Perhaps one will now follow.

There is ample reason to think the President spoke as he did out

of his experience with leakage of information which did so much to abort the adventure in Cuba. For it is nothing less than the truth that by the time the invasion was launched the facts and circumstances of its planning and particularly of the part played by the Central Intelligence Agency had been fully discussed in several big newspapers and magazines.

But, and here is the heart of the matter, many editors had voluntarily sat on the story for months and did not tell what they knew until the leaks had become a veritable flood. In fact even the first printed hints of what was up were advanced almost hesitantly by reporters who on the one hand understood the delicacy of the material but knew on the other, for example, that Guatemalan street talk had correctly diagnosed the presence and the purpose of CIA personnel at a remote airport.

The point is that when everybody at the National Press Club bar knows what's up even a fledgling Red spy will have long since transmitted the information to Moscow and Havana. In short, governmental security is sometimes terribly loose and the free press has exposed the fact.